

Meat, Poultry, and Fish Processing Workers

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What They Do

Butchers and Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers are employed at different food-processing stages by which animal carcasses are converted into manageable pieces of meat that are suitable for sale to wholesales and retailers. Butchers and Meat Cutters are usually employed at retail establishments, while Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers generally work in animal slaughtering and processing plants.

Butchers and Meat Cutters cut and separate wholesale cuts of meat into retail cuts or individually sized servings. They cut meat into steaks and chops, shape and tie roasts, and grind beef for sale as chopped meat. Butchers and Meat Cutters working in retail stores may weigh, wrap, and label the cuts of meat. They also arrange meat products in refrigerated cases for display. Butchers and Meat Cutters prepare special cuts to fill unique customer orders.

Poultry Cutters and Trimmers slaughter and cut up chickens, turkeys, and other types of poultry. Most Cutters and Trimmers perform routine cuts on poultry as it moves along production lines. The poultry-processing industry is becoming increasingly automated. However, many jobs such as trimming, packing, and deboning are still done manually.

Fish Cutters and Trimmers, also called fish cleaners, scale, cut, and prepare fish by removing the head, scales, and other inedible portions. Then they cut the fish into steaks or fillets. In retail stores, Fish Cutters and Trimmers may also wait on customers and clean fish to order.

Slaughterers and Meat Packers work in slaughtering and processing plants. They slaughter cattle, hogs, goats, and sheep, and cut the carcasses into large wholesale cuts, such as rounds, loins, ribs, and chucks. In some processing plants, Slaughterers and Meat Packers carve large parts into cuts that are ready for the retail market. They usually work on an assembly line with each individual responsible for only a few of the many cuts needed to process a carcass. Slaughterers and Meat Packers regularly use knives, cleavers, meat saws, bandsaws, or other dangerous equipment to convert carcasses into wholesale or retail cuts.

Tasks

Butchers and Meat Cutters

- ▶ Cure, smoke, tenderize, and preserve meat.
- ▶ Cut, trim, bone, tie, and grind meats, such as beef, pork, poultry, and fish, to prepare meat in cooking form.

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- ▶ Prepare and place meat cuts and products in display counter, so they will appear attractive and catch the shopper's eye.
- ▶ Prepare special cuts of meat ordered by customers.

Meat, Poultry, and Fish, Cutters and Trimmers

- ▶ Clean, trim, slice, and section carcasses for future processing.
- ▶ Cut and trim meat to prepare for packing.
- ▶ Inspect meat products for defects, bruises, or blemishes, and remove them along with any excess fat.
- ▶ Obtain and distribute specified meat or carcass.

Slaughterers and Meat Packers

- ▶ Cut, trim, skin, sort, and wash viscera of slaughtered animals to separate edible portions from offal.
- ▶ Grind meat into hamburger, and into trimmings used to prepare sausages, luncheon meats, and other meat products.
- ▶ Remove bones and cut meat into standard cuts in preparation for marketing.
- ▶ Saw, split, or scribe carcasses into smaller portions to facilitate handling.

Detailed descriptions of these occupations may be found in the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) at online.onetcenter.org.

Important Skills, Knowledge, and Abilities

- ▶ Customer and Personal Service — Knowledge of principles and processes for providing customer and personal services. This includes customer needs assessment, meeting quality standards for services, and evaluation of customer satisfaction.
- ▶ Biology — Knowledge of plant and animal organisms, their tissues, cells, functions, interdependencies, and interactions with each other and the environment.
- ▶ Food Production — Knowledge of techniques and equipment for planting, growing, and harvesting food products (both plant and animal) for consumption, including storage/handling techniques.
- ▶ Mechanical — Knowledge of machines and tools, including their designs, uses, repair, and maintenance.
- ▶ Production and Processing — Knowledge of raw materials, production processes, quality control, costs, and other techniques for maximizing the effective manufacture and distribution of goods.
- ▶ Public Safety and Security — Knowledge of relevant equipment, policies, procedures, and strategies to promote effective local, state, or national security operations for the protection of people, data, property, and institutions.
- ▶ Mathematics — Using mathematics to solve problems.
- ▶ Manual Dexterity — The ability to quickly move your hand, your hand together with your arm, or your two hands to grasp, manipulate, or assemble objects.
- ▶ Information Ordering — The ability to arrange things or actions in a certain order or pattern according to a specific rule or set of rules (e.g., patterns of numbers, letters, words, pictures, mathematical operations).

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- ▶ **Wrist-Finger Speed** — The ability to make fast, simple, repeated movements of the fingers, hands, and wrists.
- ▶ **Static Strength** — The ability to exert maximum muscle force to lift, push, pull, or carry objects.
- ▶ **Arm-Hand Steadiness** — The ability to keep your hand and arm steady while moving your arm or while holding your arm and hand in one position.
- ▶ **Extent Flexibility** — The ability to bend, stretch, twist, or reach with your body, arms, and/or legs.
- ▶ **Trunk Strength** — The ability to use your abdominal and lower back muscles to support part of the body repeatedly or continuously over time without 'giving out' or fatiguing.

Work Environment

Most Butchers and Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers frequently work in cold, damp rooms which are refrigerated to prevent meat from spoiling. Work rooms are often damp because meat cutting generates large amounts of blood and condensation. These occupations require physical strength to lift and carry large cuts of meat and the ability to stand for long periods. Butchers, and Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers work in clean and sanitary conditions; however, their clothing is often soiled with animal blood and the air may smell unpleasant. They work with powerful cutting equipment and are susceptible to cuts on the fingers or hands. Risks are minimized with the proper use of equipment, hand, and stomach guards. The repetitive nature of the work, such as cutting and slicing may lead to wrist damage (carpal tunnel syndrome).

Butchers, Meat, Poultry, and Fish Processing workers usually work a 40-hour week. Those working in retail establishments may work on the weekends. Some of these workers belong to the United Food and Commercial Workers Union. (Refer to Other Sources of Information.)

California's Job Outlook and Wages

The California Outlook and Wage table below represents the occupation across all industries.

Standard Occupational Classification	Estimated Number of Workers 2004	Estimated Number of Workers 2014	Average Annual Openings	2006 Wage Range (per hour)
Butchers and Meat Cutters				
51-3021	18,600	20,800	630	\$10.03 to \$18.96
Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers				
51-3022	8,000	9,600	340	\$8.09 to \$12.71
Slaughterers and Meat Packers				
51-3023	3,400	3,700	110	\$8.28 to \$11.67

Wages do not include self-employment.

Average annual openings include new jobs plus net replacements.

Source: www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov, Employment Projections by Occupation and OES Employment & Wages by Occupation, Labor Market Information Division, Employment Development Department.

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Trends

Employment of Butchers and Meat Cutters and Slaughterers and Packers is expected to grow at a slower rate than average for all occupations over the 2004–2014 period. Automation and the trend of centralizing the animal slaughtering and processing industries contributes to the employment decline of more highly skilled retail Butchers and Meat Cutters. Centralization enables employers to transfer employment from higher paid butchers to lower wage slaughterers and meatpackers in meatpacking plants. Currently, most red meat arrives at grocery stores partially cut. A growing quantity of meat is delivered prepackaged. This trend results in fewer jobs for retail butchers. However, opportunities will continue to arise from the need to replace employees who retire or leave the labor force for other reasons. Also, there will be a continuing need to meet the consumer demands of a growing population.

Employment of Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers is expected to grow faster than average for all occupations over the 2004–2014 period. The demand for poultry workers will remain strong with the growing popularity of labor-intensive, ready-to-heat poultry products. Also, Fish Cutters will remain in demand as the task of preparing ready-to-heat fish products continues to shift from retail stores to processing plants.

Training/Requirements/Apprenticeships

Butchers, and Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers usually follow one of the following training paths:

- ▶ High school diploma preferred
- ▶ Formal two-year apprenticeship
- ▶ Vocational school
- ▶ Regional occupational program
- ▶ Extensive on-the-job training

Most Butchers and Meat Cutters, and Poultry and Fish Cutters and Trimmers learn their skills on the job through both formal and informal training programs. Trainees begin by performing less difficult jobs, such as making simple cuts or removing bones. They work under the guidance of experienced workers to learn the proper use and care of tools and equipment and how to prepare various cuts of meat. The training period for highly skilled Butchers at the retail level may be one or two years.

Butchers and Meat Cutters provide their own hand tools at the beginning of training. These include various knives, a cleaver, stitching needles, and a sharpening steel, that together may cost \$300 or higher.

There are a limited number of apprenticeship openings each year. The usual training path for meat clerks working in grocery stores is to advance into the Butchers and Meat Cutters apprenticeship program. The employer must have a signed agreement with the Joint Apprenticeship Committee. For Butchers and Meat Cutters, approximately 4,000 hours of supervised on-the-job training is required during a two-year apprenticeship program. Apprentices learn to operate powerful cutting tools. In addition to plant work, apprentices receive an average of 144 hours per year of related classroom instruction.

Recommended High School Course Work

High school preparation courses in business mathematics and shop courses that develop skills in the use of hand and power tools are helpful.

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Where Do I Find the Job?

Direct application to employers remains one of the most effective job search methods. Butchers and Meat Cutters, and Poultry and Fish Cutters and Trimmers should apply directly to employers for training or apprenticeship programs. Unions representing Butchers and Meat Cutters, and Poultry and Fish Cutters and Trimmers also have information concerning apprenticeships and related matters.

Use the *Search for Employers by Industry* feature on the *Career Center* page at www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov to locate employers in your area. Search under the following industry names to get a list of private firms and their addresses:

- ▶ All Other Specialty Food Stores
- ▶ Animal (except Poultry) Slaughtering
- ▶ Confectionery and Nut Stores
- ▶ Convenience Stores
- ▶ Fish and Seafood Markets
- ▶ Fruit and Vegetable Markets
- ▶ Meat Markets
- ▶ Meat Processed from Carcasses
- ▶ Poultry Processing
- ▶ Rendering and Meat By-Product Processing
- ▶ Supermarket and Other Grocery Stores

Search these **yellow page** headings for listings of private firms:

- ▶ Butchering
- ▶ Fish and Seafood Brokers
- ▶ Fish and Seafood, Retail
- ▶ Fish and Seafood, Wholesale
- ▶ Meat Brokers
- ▶ Meat Cutting Service
- ▶ Meat Packers
- ▶ Meat, Retail
- ▶ Meat, Wholesale
- ▶ Poultry Dealers, Retail
- ▶ Poultry Dealers, Wholesale
- ▶ Poultry Services

Where Can the Job Lead?

Journey-level Meat Cutters may promote to head Meat Cutter, assistant manager, or manager of a shop. Journey-level Butchers may advance to an inspector or to supervisory positions. Butchers and Meat Cutters sometimes enter self-employment, becoming owners of retail shops.

Other Sources of Information

American Association of Meat Processors
www.aamp.com

California Poultry Federation
www.cpif.org

Food Products Association
www.fpa-food.org

